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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000185

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE AUTHORITIES ARREST PRO-DEMOCRACY ETHNIC LEADERS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (S) Summary: In what could be a significant setback for the democracy movement, Burmese security authorities have arrested several ethnic Shan political leaders and democracy activists, including Hkun Htun Oo, an influential political party chief and longtime ASSK supporter. Authorities have also prohibited the country's leading ethnic political coalition from commemorating Union Day on February 12. The regime's motives are unclear, but the SPDC may view ethnic musings about forming a parallel government, and recent meetings among ethnic democrats and cease-fire groups, as a threat to disrupt the regime's "road map to a disciplined democracy." End Summary.

SUPPRESSION OF DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS CONTINUES

[12.](#) (SBU) According to Embassy sources, in the early evening of February 9, Special Branch (SB) officers visited the Rangoon residences of Hkun Htun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and party secretary Sai Nyunt Lwin, and detained the two pro-democracy

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leaders for questioning.

[13.](#) (SBU) Two days later, Hkun Htun Oo and Sai Nyunt Lwin remain in custody, apparently at SB headquarters, and sources indicate they may have been charged as "subversive threats" to the State. Hkun Htun Oo is also a principal leader of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), the country's primary coalition of pro-democracy ethnic political parties. Security authorities have also forced the UNA to cancel a Union Day dinner planned for the evening of February 12 at Hkun Htun Oo's residence, to which the ethnic parties had invited NLD leaders and diplomats.

[14.](#) (C) On February 10, five SB agents returned to Sai Nyunt Lwin's house, ransacked the place for two hours, and reportedly confiscated party documents, including speeches and statements planned for traditional opposition Union Day functions. According to NLD sources, Hkun Htun Oo was scheduled to deliver the keynote address at the NLD's planned Union Day event for political party members and diplomats. (Note: As of COB February 11, this NLD event will still take place and the Chief of Mission and other emboffs plan to attend. End Note).

[15.](#) (SBU) Ethnic pro-democracy party sources also report that security authorities in Shan State arrested on February 8 two additional SNLD Central Executive Committee members, Sai Hla Aung and Sao Tha Oo, who were reportedly traveling from Taunggyi to Rangoon to attend a party meeting. The two detained persons are reportedly being held at the SB office in Taungoo, Bago Division.

[16.](#) (SBU) Unverified reports also indicate that on February 7 several pro-democracy activists were arrested in Taunggyi. They include U Shwe Ohn; Daw Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein (non-Shan), daughter of former Deputy Prime Minister U Kyaw Nyein; U Thu Wai (non-Shan), a recently released political prisoner; and Saya Mying Than, sponsor of the meeting.

COMMENT: ANOTHER BLOW TO DEMOCRACY

[17.](#) (C) The arrest of the SNLD leaders could be a significant setback for the pro-democracy movement, in particular the apparent arrest of party chief Hkun Htun Oo. He is an influential political leader who has dominated ethnic politics for the past 15 years. His SNLD party, longtime supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi, garnered 23 seats in the 1990 elections, second only to the NLD and ahead of the regime's proxy political party. Hkun Htun Oo, himself an MP-elect, has heretofore managed to evade arrest (the vast majority of MPs and pro-democracy leaders have spent time in jails or in regime security facilities since the 1990 elections) and his SNLD party is one of only two pro-democracy ethnic political parties that have not been "de-registered" by the SPDC.

[18.](#) (S) The regime's motives behind the arrest are unclear. However, members of the UNA coalition have in recent weeks quietly alluded to undefined plans to announce a parallel government. If the SPDC caught wind of such talk, and

suspected that Hkun Htun Oo would unveil any such plans on Union Day, there is no question that a swift reaction would be in store. Furthermore, Hkun Htun Oo and other UNA members have in recent months reportedly conducted secret meetings with leaders of ethnic cease-fire groups, purely, they say, to discuss generic political issues. However, there is no doubt that the regime, preparing to reconvene the National Convention in less than a week, would perceive such encounters as a conspiracy to disrupt their "road map to a disciplined democracy." End Comment.
Martinez